



## PARENTING PLAN INFORMATION AND WORKSHEET

### **1. THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN THINKING ABOUT A PARENTING PLAN:**

Parents who have been living apart or who are going to be living apart (and especially those who are scheduled for an upcoming court hearing concerning custody and visitation issues) need to remember that:

- a) In most cases your children need both parents - so the children should have "frequent and continuing contact" with BOTH parents.
- b) You can't have a workable parenting plan without some basic level of cooperation between the parents - remember that even though the plan might be a court order, it can still be flexible if the parents work together and keep the focus on what is best for the children.
- c) Your child's personality and ability to adjust to changes must be considered in coming up with a plan that will work for everyone.
- d) Your child's age and how mature he or she is must also be considered. Plans often need to be changed as children grow. The Court has continuing jurisdiction to make needed changes in parenting plans as the children grow older. When changes are needed, you can make changes in the plan by agreement without having to "go to court."
- e) Your children want and need relationships with their brothers and sisters.
- f) Always, a plan should focus FIRST on the needs of your children.

## 2. **BASICS QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:**

Parents living apart should step back and think about whether a proposed parenting plan will actually work. For instance:

- a) How far is your home from the home of the other parent, and who is going to be responsible for transporting the children not only back and forth between the parents, but also to and from schools, child care centers, doctor and dentist appointments, lessons, tutors, practices, games, etc.?
- b) What are your work schedules? Your own school schedules?
- c) What are your children's school schedules, practice schedules, game schedules, etc.?
- d) Children (especially younger children) often benefit a lot from having a predictable schedule, and predictable schedules also make planning much easier.
- e) What effect will your proposed plan have on your child's ability to spend time with friends and extended family members?
- f) Is there a need to protect your children from unacceptable behavior, such as violence or substance abuse, either by the other parent or some other person?

## 3. **SETTLING ON A PARENTING PLAN WITHOUT GOING TO COURT:**

Keeping in mind what you have just read, you can use this worksheet to begin putting together a basic Parenting Plan that can be submitted to the Court for approval on or before your Court hearing date. If both parents work together to come up with a WRITTEN plan before the Court date, there is a good chance that you may not need to attend the hearing at all. You can instead contact the court clerk or the Family Law Facilitator at (530) 406-6792 for more information on dropping or continuing your scheduled hearing. If you are attending or have attended one of the Unified Family Court's mediation orientation workshops and now have a signed custody agreement, the Family Law Facilitator can meet with BOTH parents to see

whether an agreement on any remaining issues, including child support amounts, can be worked out prior to your court date. If you succeed in settling ALL of your issues before the court date, you should not have to appear at court. Instead, you can submit your written agreements to the Court and ask that the calendared hearing be dropped.

**4. USING THIS WORKSHEET TO HELP CREATE A FINISHED AGREEMENT THAT YOU CAN SUBMIT TO THE COURT:**

This worksheet can be used to help create a parenting plan that deals with everything from basic parenting schedules, to who has the children on what holidays, to who has the authority to make decisions about your child's medical or educational needs.

a) First, provide information about your children.

Name	Date of Birth	Sex	School	Grade in School



b) If you can, go over work and school schedules with the other parent and see if you can come up with agreements on the basic issues. Often, you can come to an agreement on the basic underlying schedule. For instance, "primary" physical custody\* is agreed to go to one parent, with alternating weekends (Say, from Friday after school until a Monday morning drop off at school) to the other parent. If a basic underlying schedule is agreed to, then many of the other issues (holiday schedules, vacations, report cards, school notices, doctor appointments, etc.) might be easy to resolve. To begin, use the space here to write out each parent's work/school schedule:

<b>Mother</b>	Work	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	From							
	To							

  

<b>Father</b>	Work	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	From							
	To							

\* "Primary" physical custody simply means that the child spends more time with the parent who has primary custody. This type of arrangement is especially common with younger children. If you and the other parent are able to communicate and cooperate with each other, then you might consider a more equally shared joint physical custody order. For instance, in a "2/2/3" plan, the children spend Mondays and Tuesdays with one parent and Wednesdays and Thursdays with the other. The Friday, Saturday and Sunday "extended" weekend is alternated. With good communication and cooperation, this type of plan can work well, especially where the children are older and both parents live fairly close to the children's schools.

Now, write down a basic weekly or bi-weekly parenting schedule that YOU think would be best for the children. Keep in mind each parent's work and school schedules. Remember that in the great majority of cases the Court will want to allow for "frequent and continuing contact" with both parents:

Mother		Week One							Week Two						
	Parenting	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
	From														
	To														

Father		Week One							Week Two						
	Parenting	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
	From														
	To														



c) Is one parent going to be the primary custodial ("school") parent with the other parent mostly having agreed weekend parenting time? If so, then you might consider using one of the following options for weekend or alternate weekend times. If you think that you are going to go with a basic "school" parent as the primary custodial parent type plan, take a pen or pencil and write in possible start times and end times for the parenting time options shown. Then rank the different options from 1 (highest) to 6 (lowest) in your order of preference:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Friday \_\_\_\_ pm to Sunday \_\_\_\_ pm
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friday \_\_\_\_ pm to Monday \_\_\_\_ am or start of school
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friday \_\_\_\_ pm to Monday \_\_\_\_ pm
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thursday \_\_\_\_ pm to Monday \_\_\_\_ am or start of school
- \_\_\_\_\_ Saturday \_\_\_\_ am to Sunday \_\_\_\_ pm
- \_\_\_\_\_ Saturday \_\_\_\_ am to Monday \_\_\_\_ am or start of school

d) Now, do you want to add mid-week parenting time in addition to the agreed weekends? Remember "frequent and continuing contact" with both parents. First, consider using one of the following options for midweek parenting time with the "other" parent. These options are a good way to keep both parents involved in the children's after school activities (games, practices, etc.), and also allows each parent time to help with homework and other school projects, plus time for having mid-week dinners with the children. Again, take a pen or pencil, write in possible start times and end times, and rank the options from 1 (highest) to 4 (lowest) in order of preference:

- \_\_\_\_\_ every Monday and Wednesday from \_\_\_\_ pm to \_\_\_\_ pm
- \_\_\_\_\_ every Tuesday and Thursday from \_\_\_\_ pm to \_\_\_\_ pm
- \_\_\_\_\_ alternate Wednesdays from \_\_\_\_ pm (pickup at school) to \_\_\_\_ pm
- \_\_\_\_\_ alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays from \_\_\_\_ pm to \_\_\_\_ pm

e) You may want a more equally shared parenting plan. You can try starting with one of the weekend agreements shown above, and then add mid-week OVERNIGHT time, either on an every week or an alternate week basis. Consider using one of the options below for midweek OVERNIGHT parenting time. Again, take a pen or pencil, write in possible start times and end times, and then try ranking them in order of preference, from 1 (highest) to 3 (lowest). Keeping in mind everyone's schedules, would any of these options work? Which might work best? Why? After ranking the options, try writing down some reasons why you feel that any of these options for mid-week overnight parenting time would or would not work for your children.

\_\_\_\_\_ Monday \_\_\_\_ pm to Tuesday \_\_\_\_ am or start of school

\_\_\_\_\_ Wednesday \_\_\_\_ pm to Thursday \_\_\_\_ pm or start of school

\_\_\_\_\_ Wednesday \_\_\_\_ pm to Friday \_\_\_\_ am or start of school

f) Now put all of the above schedules together.

Mother		Week One							Week Two						
	Parenting	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
	From														
	To														

Father		Week One							Week Two						
	Parenting	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
	From														
	To														

g) Do you want to have an agreed holiday and vacation schedule? Use the chart below to make up a draft plan. Be sure to specify when agreed parenting time for one of the longer school holidays (like Spring Break or Winter Break) should start and end. Remember that the holiday and vacation schedule will have preference over the basic weekly schedule. (For example, if Mother usually has the children on Thursday but Fourth of July goes to Father and it falls on a Thursday, the children go with Father.)

Holiday	Time (from when to when)	Every Year Mother/Father	Even Years Mother/Father	Odd Years Mother/Father
Jan.1 (New Year's Day)				
Martin Luther King's Birthday (weekend)				
Lincoln's Birthday				
President's Day (weekend)				
Spring Break, first half				
Spring Break, second half				
Mother's Day				
Memorial Day (weekend)				
Father's Day				
July 4 <sup>th</sup>				
Labor Day (weekend)				
Columbus Day (weekend)				
Halloween				
Veteran's Day (weekend)				
Thanksgiving Day				
Thanksgiving weekend				
Winter Break, first half				
Winter Break, second half				
New Year's Eve				
Child's Birthday				
Mother's Birthday				



Holiday	Time (from when to when)	Every Year Mother/Father	Even Years Mother/Father	Odd Years Mother/Father
Father's Birthday				
Summer Break, first half				
Summer Break, second half				
Other (specify)				

h) Are there other items that you can agree on which you want to make part of the parenting plan? Do you want to equally share the responsibility for making most of the decisions about your child's schooling and health care, for instance? If so, you will want a joint legal custody order. If one parent will be making the decisions but the other parent (maybe living some distance away) is still involved and still wants to be kept current, you might agree to a modified type of joint legal custody order. Under this type of order, the custodial parent has the general decision-making authority, but with other parent will still have access to your child's records and also the right to confer with the school and health care providers. Where there is minimal involvement from the other parent, you might want to request sole legal custody. Remember that who has legal custody is a separate issue from who has physical custody or how parenting time is shared. Who has legal custody can be especially important where there is a potential for disagreement regarding course of treatment, need for counseling, educational plans, etc.

Preferred legal custody arrangement:

## GOOD LUCK IN WORKING OUT A PARENTING PLAN!

REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN USE THE MEDIATION ORIENTATION TO OBTAIN HELP IN PUTTING TOGETHER AN AGREEMENT BEFORE YOUR COURT DATE.

REMEMBER ALSO THAT ATTENDING THE MEDIATION ORIENTATION PROVIDES YOU WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO AGREE ON A PARENTING PLAN YOURSELVES, WITHOUT HAVING TO SUBMIT THE MATTER TO THE COURT FOR DECISION.

FINALLY, ATTENDING MEDIATION ORIENTATION ALSO GETS YOU SAME-DAY ASSISTANCE FROM THE FAMILY LAW FACILIATOR'S OFFICE. THE MEDIATOR CONDUCTING THE MEDIATION ORIENTATION WILL BE ABLE TO REFER YOU DIRECTLY TO THE FACILITATOR IF A PARENTING PLAN IS SUCCESSFULLY WORKED OUT. THE FACILITATOR CAN THEN HELP YOU RESOLVE ANY OTHER ISSUES (E.G., CHILD SUPPORT, USE OF PROPERTY, PAYMENT OF DEBTS) THAT MIGHT REMAIN. IF YOU ARE ABLE TO REACH AN AGREEMENT ON ALL OF THE ISSUES THAT ARE SCHEDULED FOR A HEARING, **YOU WILL THEN BE ABLE TO PUT TOGETHER A WRITTEN SETTLEMENT, SUBMIT IT TO THE COURT FOR APPROVAL, AND DROP YOUR HEARING FROM THE COURT'S CALENDAR.**

